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3 (b): Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

Statement submitted by Marie Stopes International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social council[2]

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1] E/CN.9/2018/1.
[2] The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration — the need for family planning

Marie Stopes International is a global organisation providing personalised contraception and safe abortion services to women and girls in 37 countries. The services the organization provides empower women to choose when or whether they have children. The services also give women the freedom to pursue hopes and dreams that can transform their lives. Whether that means pursuing an education or improving their health, having that choice can be very transformative. The organization would like to thank the Commission on Population and Development for the opportunity to discuss the theme of sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration and would like to point out the importance of family planning and safe abortion services within this theme.

Background

Urban settlements are growing faster than ever before — currently over half of the world's population lives in urban areas and estimates show that by 2030 this growth will have increased to about two-thirds of the global population. To ensure that cities are growing in a sustainable manner, it is important to understand both, the populations already living in cities and those moving there.

While urban growth is a result of natural population growth, rural-to-urban migration and international migration, this submission will focus more on international migration. International migrants are more likely to reside in urban areas as a result of greater opportunities and migrant networks in urban settings. While they make up only 3.3 per cent of the global population, many metropolitan areas have a much higher percentage of immigrants.

Almost half of all migrants are women and most of them are of reproductive age. The rapid growth of urban centres in many low and middle-income countries has been paired with a growth in the number of urban poor, along with the size of urban slums. The United Nations Population Fund has estimated that in 2010, about 62 per cent of urban populations in sub-Saharan Africa lived in slums. These informal settlements are a predicament to the development and planning of sustainable cities.

Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable Cities

Sustainable Development Goal 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. To achieve this goal, the specific needs of populations in vulnerable situations — including both migrant and non-migrant urban poor and in particular those living in urban slums — must be considered in urban development planning. Specifically, cities need to consider how to increase access to basic public services like education and health for these vulnerable groups. Meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of urban poor women is particularly crucial for the development of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

Challenges for migrant women in urban areas

Although migrants, are an economically diverse group, they are over-represented among the urban poor. Recent migrants lack support from relatives or friends, and migrant women in particular often find employment in low-paying occupations, increasing their vulnerability. Moreover, due to legal, social and cultural barriers — particularly if they live in slums — they might be excluded from accessing

basic public services. This creates further marginalization — urban slums often have lower levels of education, higher levels of ill health and higher total fertility rates.

The benefits of addressing the needs of marginalized migrant women

Meeting the needs of marginalized migrant women, along with other vulnerable urban groups, can have a positive impact on development and it is also a precursor in creating sustainable and inclusive cites. Ensuring that all women have access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is beneficial on two fronts: first, it advances women's rights and empowers women to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, fertility and future; second, the reduction in total fertility rate that occurs when women's family planning and safe abortion needs are met can have spill-over effects that provide an overall societal benefit. Both reduce the rate of urban population growth, relieving some pressure and allowing for better and more efficient urban planning; and it has positive effects on economic growth and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Marie Stopes International has developed a tool to estimate the benefits of investing in family planning services and has created a hypothetical sub-Saharan nation to demonstrate the potential positive effects. The nation, called "Contraceptia", has 2.2 million women of reproductive age with about one-third having an unmet need for modern contraceptives. If only 5 per cent more of those women gained access to contraception, the hypothetical nation would see a 35 per cent increase in GDP per capita, a 3.4 per cent increase in the girls' primary school completion rate, and a four-point decline in its "Fragile State Index" score — moving it out of the Alert category. While this is a hypothetical example, it demonstrates well the potential of improving women's access to family planning services.

A social experiment in Matlab Thana, Bangladesh provides a real-life example of some of the benefits that can come from ensuring that women have access to family planning services. One hundred and forty-one villages were selected to participate in the study. In half of the villages, female health workers contacted married women of reproductive age in their homes regularly offering contraception. The control villages and programme villages had similar fertility rates at the beginning of the experiment, however, by the end of the experiment nineteen years later, the programme villages had 15 per cent lower fertility levels than the control villages. Population growth had also slowed, women between the ages of 25 and 54 earned about 40 per cent higher monthly wages and there was increased schooling, better nutritional health status and more lifetime assets per adult in the programme villages compared to the control villages.

Allowing women to decide if they want to have children and when to have them can have both individual and societal impacts that go hand in hand with the objectives of sustainable development and allows for safer and better planned cities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While the urbanization of the world population is inevitable, the growth of slums and the urban poor is not. Family planning and safe abortion services for marginalized urban women, including migrant women and the urban poor, can allow for better planned, safer and more inclusive cities and development processes.

In order to do this, there needs to be a better understanding of the demographics in urban areas. There is also evidence showing that local governments are uniquely positioned to respond to the needs of migrants, due to their understanding of the local context and their role in providing public services.

- Data should be disaggregated by migratory status in order to identify gaps and adequately respond to the needs of migrant women.
- Local governments should include sexual and reproductive health needs of migrant women and other vulnerable groups in their policies and forecasting including access to family planning and safe abortion services.

The development of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities is not possible without addressing the needs of those furthest behind. Universal access to family planning and safe abortion services in urban areas is a necessary step in the sustainable development process.